

1 Yoruba?Orature: The Fundamental Basis for Teaching Yorubá
2 Numeral

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4 *Received: 15 September 2021 Accepted: 2 October 2021 Published: 15 October 2021*

5

6 **Abstract**

7 Without mincing words, there is a gradual loss of long-aged tradition, a method of equipping
8 young ones for life. In Yorùbá traditional setting, the teaching of Yorùbá numerals remains an
9 authentic means of transmitting culture from one generation to another. This paper attempts
10 to examine that Yorùbá traditional education is deeply rooted in Yorùbá orature. Equally, it
11 shows that the education system had been part and parcel of the society and it is not the
12 training given in modern education but education which the indigenous black people of Africa
13 offered. Additionally, the paper establishes that Yorùbá orature serves both recreational as
14 well as educational purposes to prove that the use of Yorùbá orature is a fundamental basis
15 for teaching the young ones the Yorùbá numerals as embedded in the culture and tradition of
16 the people. Apart from this immediate and apparent function of teaching the young ones, the
17 teaching of Yorùbá numerals initiates child(ren) into the various phases of life. This research
18 work adopted both primary and secondary research methods.

19

20 **Index terms**— yorùbá orature, yorùbá numerals, traditional education, western-education, society, theory,
21 culture, children.

22 **1 Introduction**

23 his paper examines how Yorùbá traditional education is deeply-rooted in Yorùbá orature. According to a Yorùbá
24 proverb which says, "Àkùrò? ti lómi té? lè? kí òjò tó rò? si" (A marshy land already contains water before the
25 rain falls). Before the advent of Western education in the mid-nineteenth century, Yorùbá had a fundamental
26 means of educating their children. Therefore, when the Europeans came and introduced their system of formal
27 education in the society, it was not new because it was regarded as an additional and perhaps a modern way of
28 seemingly developing the intelligence of the people. The traditional educational system had been part and parcel
29 of the society before experiencing the school pudding. This Yorùbá traditional education system is in line with
30 ??wonyi (1975: 357) when he says:

31 No education system stands apart from the society which establishes it, and education has purposes which
32 it must achieve if that society is to continue in the right direction. Education, therefore, draws inspiration and
33 nourishment from society and contributes in turn to social opportunities for growth and renewal.

34 In essence, Yorùbá educated elites should appreciate that education has to do with people's culture and
35 tradition. ??ester (1957: 9) rightly observes this when he defines education as:

36 The culture which each generation purposely gives is to those who are to be its successors, to qualify them for
37 at least keeping up, and if possible for raising the level of improvement which it has attained.

38 The obvious implication is that it seems impossible to educate the child properly or effectively outside his
39 cultural environment. Long More (1959: 7) justifies this when he says:

40 If a man does away with his traditional way of living and throws away his good customs, he had better be
41 certain he has something worth more invaluable to replace them.

42 It is pertinent that scholars have not intensified much research effort on how a Yorùbá child can be taught
43 Yorùbá numerals effectively through Yorùbá orature. Also, one should realise that the Yorùbá traditional society
44 has something to proffer educational theory and practice, which is brought out lucidly in its educational pattern

45 through a combination of precepts and orature. By orature we mean, rich corporal of texts as are derivable from
46 folklore, proverbs, chants, recitations, songs, riddles, folktales, and incantations, presented in oral form for the
47 aim of animating and influencing the behavior of each other in a speech society.

48 Yorùbá orature is used amongst the Yorùbá to express a thought in vivid metaphor, to describe a person or
49 thing in more obscure metaphor, to provide a form of amusement and it has an instructive value. In essence,
50 Yorùbá orature combines recreational and educational features. Some scholars have researched the study of
51 Yorùbá traditional method of education; for example, Ajàyí 1990, examines riddles and the Yorùbá child: while
52 Callaway (1975) explains indigenous education in Yorùbá society. Fáfúnwá (1975) concerns himself on education
53 in the mother tongue among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria. Fájánà (1966) attempts to appreciate some aspects
54 of Yorùbá traditional education and education policy in Nigeria traditional society in (1972) respectively. Also,
55 Obidi (1997) writes on Yorùbá indigenous education in while O? lájubù ??1978) dealt with the use of Yorùbá
56 folktales as a means of moral education.

57 This paper has attempted a micro-study of Yorùbá orature as a means of teaching Yorùbá numerals. That is,
58 the preceding writers have not examined the reading of numerals in the Yorùbá thought system.

59 2 II.

60 3 Analysis

61 In Yorùbá society, song serves as a means of communication. The Yorùbá people sing on all occasions. Such
62 occasions include a time of joy and sorrow. In essence, one could conclude that songs permeate Yorùbá life.
63 Consequently, songs serve as one of the means through which the Yorùbá teach numerals, as discussed below.

64 4 Orin (Songs)

65 Lílé

66 5 Èrò wá wò wá o o

67 People should come and watch us.

68 From the preceding example, it is observed that numbers one to ten are sung in a sonorous voice to teach the
69 young ones the Yorùbá numerals. As the Yorùbá children are lovers of songs, it is very stress-free to teach them
70 how to count one to ten. By rendering this song repeatedly, the act of counting becomes part and parcel of their
71 knowledge.

72 6 Ìwúre

73 Ìwúre is the prayerful aspect of the oral medium of communication between man and gods in Yorùbá culture.
74 Like songs, i?úre also permeates Yorùbá life. In essence, the Yorùbá pray on every occasion either in joy or
75 sorrow. Therefore, it will not be a surprise if the Yorùbá uses ìwúre as one of the means of teaching their children
76 numerals, as it is analysed below: One searches more for whatever he has. Ení: Ànímó? ówó,

77 Owó yóò máá wá e? wálé Money will search for you. O? mo? yóò máá wá e? wálé Children will search for
78 you. Ire ayé yóò máá wá e? wálé. Às? e? ! Good fortunes will search for you. Amen

79 From the above excerpt, one realizes that the Yorùbá can teach their children numerals accurately through
80 supplicatory devices (ìwúre).

81 7 Ewì Eré Òs? ùpá (Moonlight Poetry)

82 It is important to note that in Yorùbá culture, children often go out during the moonlight time to socialize
83 together. During this occasion, they chant various children's poems to display their intellectual wit. Also, such
84 chanting serves as the means of training their tongue or enhancing speech ability. In essence, moonlight poetry
85 serves as means of education and even as a serious test of mental capacity. That is ten

86 The above example is not only used to enhance children's smooth speech ability but mainly to teach them to
87 count numerals from one to ten. When this is done repeatedly during the moonlight game, obviously, children
88 become experts in counting. In totality, such moonlight poetry is an indirect way of teaching numerals in Yorùbá
89 culture.

90 8 E? se? Ifá (Ifá Corpus)

91 Ifá corpus is not only used by the diviners to predict the future but also serves as a way of teaching young ones
92 how to count numbers. This basic knowledge enriches children's prowess. ??he From the preceding, the researcher
93 observed that the Ifá corpus teaches children the act of counting numerals. This system roots seriously in Yorùbá's
94 traditional society.

95 9 Ewì O? mo? dé (Children's Poetry)

96 In Yorùbá culture, some poems connect to children's games. Such poems are known as "Ewì O? mo? dé"
97 (children poetry). Children render these types of poems during the moonlight game to open or commence the

98 day's activities. The children usually render them one after the other to determine whether a child makes a
99 mistake or a free performance. In essence, such poems serve to develop children's mental skills. It is realized
100 from the above excerpt that "Ewì O? mo? dé" is a device not only to teach children numerals but also to refresh
101 their memory.

102 **Àló? Àpagbè (Folktales)**

103 Folktales serve as a device not only to teach children good morals but also to teach them numerals in Yorùbá
104 culture. A good example is a folktale titled, "Lákíti àti Ará Ò ? run" (Lákíti and Men of the heaven). In the
105 distant past, there was a quarrel between Lákíti and the men of the underworld, which invariably led to physical
106 combat. The men of the underworld numbered ten confronted Lákíti in turns in a fight to finish the combat.
107 The combat began with the one-headed man who came forward to slug it out with Lákíti in the presence of a
108 large audience. Shortly after the combat started, the drummers commenced saying thus, Lílé:

109 Lákíti Within a twinkle of eyes, Lákíti defeated the two-headed man by killing him. All the people hailed him
110 for his victory.

111 The three-headed man came out desperately to fight Lákíti. This time it was a tug of war. The drummers
112 commenced their usual song thus: Lílé:

113 Lákíti kò lè jà (abbl) Solo: Lákíti cannot fight (etc.)

114 Ègbè: Njé? ó lè jà? (bbl) Chorus: Can he fight? (etc.)

115 It took Lákíti no time to win the dwell by killing his challenger. The shout of joy over Lákíti's victory spread
116 all over the places.

117 The four-headed man came out, and Lákíti defeated him in the same grand style. The five-headed took his
118 turn, and it was the same story of victory for Lákíti.

119 The six-headed man challenged Lákíti to the fight to finish the war. But luck was in Lákíti's favor.

120 The seven-headed man came out, aiming to defeat Lákíti. But, the whole thing was just like a dream because
121 Lákíti recorded a victory over his victim.

122 The eight-headed man promised to give Lákíti a tough fight but all in vain. Lákíti claimed victory over his
123 challenger.

124 The nine-headed man came out with full force to silence Lákíti just with a few blows. But Lákíti escaped
125 defeat. This victory earned Lákíti instant popularity before the audience.

126 The ten-headed man came out so determined to avenge all the death blow that Lákíti had rained on his fellow
127 men. As soon as the fight began, both the drummers and the signers went into action, thus: Lílé:

128 Lákíti kò lè jà (bbl) Solo: Lákíti cannot fight (etc.)

129 Ègbè: Njé? ó lè jà? (bbl) Chorus: Can he fight? (etc.)

130 The ten-headed man took the advantage that Lákíti was already tired of his previous fights. He unleashed
131 dead blows on Lákíti, and he dropped down dead. This event saddened the audience, and they went home
132 disappointed and unceremoniously. The tenheaded man performed a miracle by resuscitating his fellow men,
133 numbering nine, and all of them, including the ten-headed man, went home alive in happiness and elaborate
134 jubilations. Surprisingly, Lákíti's son, who was the only one left behind, came out from his hide-out after all the
135 ten men of the underworld had left to rescue his father. Both Lákíti and his son went home in joy too.

136 It is worth noting that one of the numerous devices adopted by the Yorùbá to teach the young ones numerals
137 in society often uses the above folktale. Also, in the above folktale, Lákíti's challengers were numbered ten.
138 He defeated the first nine, that is, oneheaded man, two-headed man, three-headed man, four-headed man, five-
139 headed man, six-headed man, seven-headed man, eight-headed man, and nineheaded man. But unfortunately,
140 the ten-headed man defeated Lákíti as a result of his tiredness.

141 **11 III.**

142 **12 Conclusion**

143 It is apparent to stress in this paper that the use of Yorùbá orature as a fundamental basis for teaching young
144 ones the Yorùbá numerals ensues the culture and tradition of the people. Also, teaching numerals effectively
145 through Yorùbá orature has started in the distant past before the advent of westernization of Yorùbá education.

146 The various ways of imparting Yorùbá numerals into the knowledge of Yorùbá children are through song,
147 ìwúre, moonlight poetry, folktales, children poetry, and Ifá literary corpus. These various ways permeate the
148 Yorùbá life because the system is deep-rooted in Yorùbá culture and tradition. The method should be encouraged
149 to ensure that the children's upbringing is a continuing partnership between the school and Yorùbá society.

150 Finally, it is shown in this paper that the Yorùbá traditional society has something to offer for education
151 theory and practice. Indeed, this fact, which sustains the teaching of Yorùbá numerals, is a reason why orature
152 still continues as fundamental means by which we teach Yorùbá numerals to children despite the challenge of
153 western education.

È? Agbó? n ayé kò ní ta ó?	Three: Agbó? n (widely) will not sting you
ta: Oyin ayé kò ní ta ó? , Àkéekèe ayé kò ní ta ó?	Oyin (honey bee) will not sting you. Akéekèe (scorpion) will bot sting you. Amen.
È? È? rín lo? mo? dé? rín kawó, rín: È? rín làgbàlagbà? rín pobì È? rín làgbàrá? rín pàdé odò ló? nà	Four: It is with happiness that kids count money It is with joy that adults pieces cola nut It is with happiness that erosion meets with the river, Your ways will result in fortune and happiness. Amen
Tè? rín, tè? ye? ni ò? rò? re? yóò máa jási. Às? e? ! ÀrúnÀrùn ò ní so? é? ló? jò? kale? . Às? e? !	Five: A prolonged disease will not attack you. Amen.
È? È? fale fako ni tèrúkó? fà: Gbogbo ohun tí ó bá fo? wó? fà Yóò máa jási rere Ìfà yóò máa wo? lé tò? é? wá. Às? e? !	Six: Hoes bring forth booties everywhere; whatever you struggle for, will come into being Booties will come on your way. Amen
Èje: Bí Olúgbó? n s? orò yóò kìje Bí Are? sà s? orò yóò kìje Às? eyo? rí yóò máa jé? tire. Às? e? !	Seven: Olúgbó? n's festival lasts seven days. Arè? sà's festival lasts seven days, Success will be yours. Amen.
È? Jò? jò? agbò níí mágbò níyì jo? : Ilé re? a jo? Ò? nà re? a jo? . Às? e? !	Eight: Agbò's (ox) overgrown hair gives it re- spect Your home will be orderly. Your ways will be good. Amen.
È? Ilé ayé 'a san e? sówó sán: Á san é? só? mo? Á san é? sí ire gbogbo Alé? yóò san é? ju òwúrò? lo? . Às? e? !	Nine: Life will favour you with money Life will favor you with children. Life will favor you with good things. Your future will be better than the present. Amen.
È? Wíwá ni a? wá mó? to? wó? e? wá: ni	Ten:

[Note: ànímó? o? mo? One: You will have more money; you will have more children. Ànímó? àíkú túí s? e
baálè? o? rò? , As? e? ! You will have long life which supersedes everything. Amen Èjì:]

Figure 1:

Ègbè:	kò lè jà (2ce) Njé? ó lè jà?	Solo:	Lákíti cannot fight (2ce) Can he
Lílé:	(2ce) Kó gbé e párá kó fi dá	Chorus:	fight? (2ce) He lifts promptly
Ègbè:	Njé? ó lè jà? Kó yàn bò? n-	Solo:	to win Can he fight? He sounds
Lílé:	ùn bí ibo? n ?jé? ó lè jà?	Chorus:	like a gun Can he fight? (etc.)
Ègbè: Instantly,	Abbl. Lákíti kò lè jà (bbl) Njé? ó lè jà? (abbl)	Solo:	Lákíti cannot fight (etc) Can he
Lílé:		Chorus:	fight? (etc)
Ègbè:		Solo:	
		Chorus:	

Figure 2:

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